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ABSTRACT

This paper offers definitions and descriptions, and explores the dynamics, of "strategic grantseeking" as a means of supporting economic development programs. Strategic grantseeking is a natural and dynamic tool usable with any economic development program. It consists of a set of concepts, procedures, and tools which are integrated into a long-term institutional commitment to a system of grant development using dynamic staff training and community linkages. One model for implementing strategic grantseeking for rural economic development uses university-based community education centers (UCEC). UCECs have characteristics and resources which easily lend themselves to strategic grantseeking. Such resources include faculty, library support, and already existing networks of vital contacts. The process revolves around the goal of creating a statewide infrastructure of local community education programs with staffs that are trained in grant writing. The process involves a series of grant writing workshops and the development of proposal development teams (PDT). Strategic grantseeking encourages the local community to seek grants independently or as part of a PDT. Cooperation between the UCECs and local community education programs is imperative. A model for utilizing the UCEC as the focus for strategic grantseeking is described and 10 program implementation steps are listed. The document concludes that communities and UCECs should incorporate strategic grantseeking in their efforts to bring all available resources to bear on their economic needs and problems. (TES)

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A MODEL FOR RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Rural communities have the same kinds an types of problems as urban areas. What rural communities do not have is ready access to an adequate resource base for developing remedies. This paper has the premise that strategic grantseeking encompasses flexible geographic catchment areas and thereby allows the creation of a network of effective grantseeking activity. These activities can be based in a multitude of organizational environments (i.e., university or college, public schools), or be grounded in a community education program.

Strategic grantseeking is a natural and dynamic tool usable with any economic development program. One definition of strategic grantseeking is the creation and operation of a system of grant development which focuses on the future desired state of the grantee, rather than an immediate, narrow-focused grant proposal. Further, strategic grantseeking is a long-term commitment to a system of grant development by way of dynamic staff development and community linkages. It can be integrated at any level of economic development. Strategic grantseeking in concert with economic programs can encompass education, vocational education or public health issues. Existing educational organizations and private industry councils can easily activate viable strategic grantseeking networks.

Strategic Grantseeking: Nomenclature

This paper explores the definitions, descriptions and dynamics of strategic grantseeking in terms of supporting economic development programs.

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Particular attention is given to the program characteristics found in a strategic grantseeking fully integrated in rural economic development programs. For example, in Northwestern Oklahoma, 11 public schools pooled resources through a cooperative agreement designed to dramatically improve the quality of education. In large part, these schools have integrated strategic grantseeking via a line-item in their planning and operational budgets. Strategic grantseeking encompasses every school and community agency. While their focus in education, a secondary interest is overall economic development due to the scarce resources found in their area of service. Through strategic grantseeking the education needs are integrated with community economic needs.

One model for implementing strategic grantseeking in rural areas desiring strong economic development programs is the merging of the strategic grantseeking concept with university based community education programs. The advantages are clear. University based community education programs have the resources, maturity and flexibility needed for rural economic development.

Implementation of a strategic grantseeking capability in these university based community education centers (UCEC) marries the strengths of both concepts into one strong, dynamic program for rural area economic development. On one side, strategic grantseeking is grounded on the principles of strategic planning. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide the development of an organization (Bryson, 1988; Lorenz, 1982). On the other side is the UCEC with a long history of effective program development. The following sections will discuss the UCEC organization, some principles of strategic planning, the strategic grantseeking program, a UCEC success story, and a model of strategic grantseeking based in a university setting. Developing a strong linkage between rural areas and the UCEC insures the creation of a series of successful local economic development

programs. It is important that initial efforts of rural economic development via strategic grantseeking be grounded in a UCEC.

UCECs have characteristics which easily lend themselves to strategic grantseeking. These include the following:

1. A leadership committed to the principles of community education (Seay, 1974);

2. An instructional function primarily aimed at preservice training for leaders and administrators;

3. A service function based on:

   a. inservice training
   b. provision of information and approaches for greater community involvement and understanding
   c. community problem solving
   d. proposal writing assistance;

4. A research function directed at identified community problems (Heimstra, 1972).

A good UCEC model is one where the UCEC plays a supportive role to the local public school districts and assists in the financial development of community education.

In summary, a UCEC has the resources, available faculty, library support, and a state-wide network of vital contacts. The UCEC can pull together various grouping of these resources and focus them on specific local needs. This ability makes for a perfect host to strategic grantseeking.

The process, as implemented, revolved around the goal of creating a state-wide infrastructure of local community education programs which had individuals on their staffs trained in grant writing. The process involved the more aggressive local community education centers which hosted a series of two-day grant empowerment workshops. Using the attendees as marketers for other workshops was a natural next step. The final step was the use of secondary schools and the vocational-technical schools as workshop sites.

Once enough workshops have been held (a finite number is purely subjective at this point in time), active communities can begin applying for grants, either individually or cooperatively as proposal development teams (PDT).

Since the varied criteria of the proposal process requires different kinds of expertise and resources, next objective is to develop a team comprised to specifically trained individuals, PDT, which can formulate and anticipate any criteria from the federal/state sectors. A PDT, at a minimum, would have a:

1. program specialist;
2. budget specialist;
3. writer/editor;
4. word processing specialist; and
5. UCEC grant writer.

Each community would provide the program specialist as the person most intimate with both the community and the program. The UCEC would provide the rest of the team.

Results to date have proved encouraging. The beginning of a steady flow of money into the UCEC-OSU is evident. The grant workshops average two each quarter with a net income between $500 to $1,000 from each workshop. More importantly, the UCEC-OSU has established a growing infrastructure which reinforces the community education network already in existence. The UCEC-OSU has expectations of developing a strategic grantseeking network anchored with six major community based partnerships. These six partnerships will access all levels of the state's population will help alleviate the money problems outlined in this article.

Strategic Grantseeking

Strategic grantseeking is simply a set of concepts, procedures and tools which are integrated into a long-term institutional commitment where various community stakeholders can work cooperatively with the UCEC in seeking and acquiring grant monies.

One of the more important elements of strategic grantseeking is broad-based community involvement. In strategic grantseeking the environment should be studied and evaluated as to needs and resources to help insure grant writing success.

Cooperation between UCECs and local community education programs is imperative. So that cooperation can take place each entity must go through the process of defining its role as it relates to community education. Each must ask itself questions like: Who are we serving? What are the needs of the people in our community? What resources are available in the community? What kind of relationships need to be established to make the best use of limited resources?

The UCECs must examine their role even more specifically with additional questions such as: What resources do we have that need to be made accessible to communities in our program area? How can the community education programs identify needs that the UCEC may have programs or resources to meet? And, how can the UCEC assist communities in conducting needs assessments?

In this process of role definition, strong communication linkages must be established. As institutions begin to articulate their perceptions of their roles it will be easier for the UCECs and the local community education programs to understand each other. Each must be ready to adapt its role in the process of designing and implementing a model that will be most effective in utilizing the scarce resources of the UCEC and the community.

Supported by the UCEC, a cooperating network of local communities can raise the overall success rate for grantseeking. The strategic grantseeking concept encourages local communities to seek grants independently, or collaboratively, as part of a PDT.

The advantages of a federally sponsored research program to a UCEC and local communities are numerous. Prominent among the advantages are: increased potential for contributing new knowledge to community education; the ability to attract to a UCEC well trained faculty committed to the goals of community education; greater institutional prestige, the recruitment of better students; greater visibility of local community education programs with consequent increase in fund-raising potential; and greater support for facilities, new services and larger operating budgets (Barton, 1980).

UCEC-OSU Empowerment Model: Synergy for the 21st Century

Efforts are underway to develop a model for utilizing the UCEC as the focus for strategic grantseeking. This model can be another tool for the development of community economic development programs. Up to this point most resources for community economic development have been lodged in the individual communities across the nation. This network of communities has made great strides in helping themselves develop community economic development programs. But the constant shortage of funds has left this effort short of its goal. The UCEC Strategic Grantseeking Empowerment Model could alleviate part of the budget shortfalls by providing a potential for UCECs and the communities they serve to become financially self-sufficient through strategic grantseeking.

The model is composed of three major elements: 1) develop a university based strategic grantseeking infrastructure; 2) assist the UCEC program area

develop an external grantseeking capability; and 3) creation and use of continuous evaluation process. (See page 8)

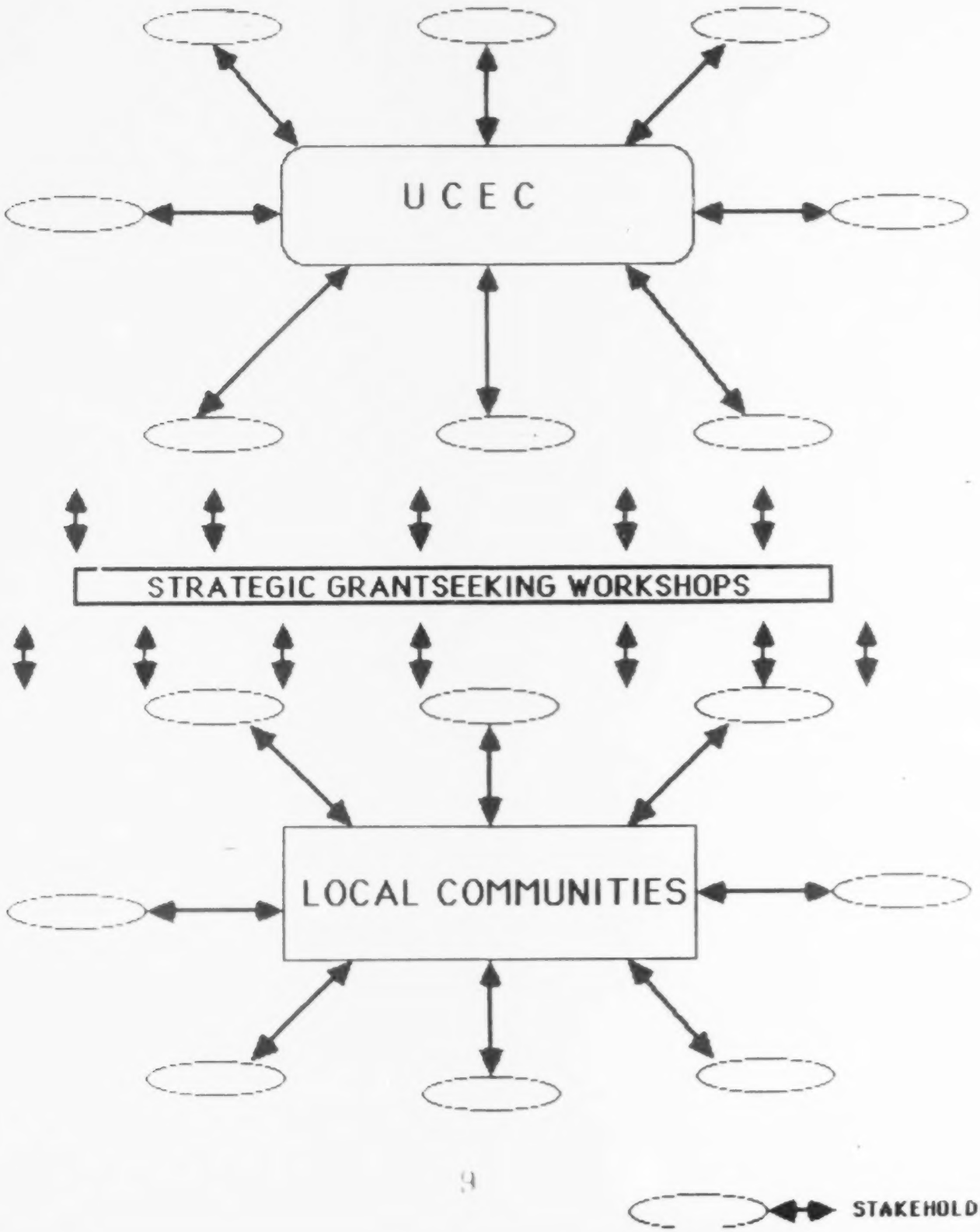
Expansion of these elements breaks down into 10 progressive steps for implementation:

1. Develop strategic grant empowerment capability.
2. Assess the external environment for opportunities or obstacles.
3. Assess the internal capabilities of the university center.
4. Develop appropriate marketing strategies.
5. Implement grant empowerment workshops.
6. Identify immediate and strategic issues facing participating local communities.
7. Initiate a specific grant seeking process with local communities.
8. Identify areas of UCEC/community needs.
9. Stabilize means and methods for maintaining network of cooperation.
10. Evaluate the process and outcomes of the UCEC/community education process.

This is a continuous cyclical process. Once the internal infrastructure has been initiated and the external environment has been carefully examined for opportunities and challenges. The process is monitored and evaluated for improvement.

UCECs can use grants to bring in extra money for economic development programs. However, few communities have utilized UCECs and strategic grantseeking as an integral part of their economic development. UCECs need to develop staff as grant writers. These individuals will work with community level programs, state or regional programs to develop a cadre of grant writer who can serve as resource people to local communities developing community education programs. This cadre can be developed through a program of inservice staff workshops designed to give them a thorough background in three

STRATGIC GRANTSEEKING / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MODEL



elements of successful grant writing: grant mechanics, grantsmanship, and strategic grantseeking.

Individuals trained by the UCEC staff will be successful because they are part of the communities in which they work. This means that the impetus for seeking appropriate grants for their local community education programs is not coming solely from a UCEC, state department of education or the federal government, but from within the community.

One of the mechanisms for developing successful strategic grantseeking at the community level is the creation of the series of recurring grant development workshops. Supporting these workshops is a system of technical assistance based at the UCEC. The technical assistance is provided by the staff of the UCEC. The role of technical assistance, usually perceived as being one of reaction, is in this instance a role of "pro-action." Emphasis shifts from passive response to proactive, field-initiated requests for consultation, statistics, and hands-on help.

This kind of technical assistance will establish strong relations and trust between the UCEC and local community stakeholders. During site visits in the field, problems and needs for assistance can be addressed on the spot. This personalized approach to technical assistance will erase anxiety of people in the field. Regular and repeated personal contact on site is the cement to this concept of UCEC strategic grantseeking (Cookingham, 1982).

Conclusion

In conclusion, if UCECs are going to make a reality of the idea of bringing all of the available resources of the community to bear on the economic needs and problems of their local clients, then integration of strategic grantseeking must be an active part of that reality. Communities and UCECs can no longer afford the luxury of approaching community development

haphazardly.

Successful implementation of the UCEC based strategic grantseeking concept demands that the resources available in every community for fund raising be brought together and integrated through strategic grantseeking. Each community and educational institution must identify what resources they have and how they are willing to expend these resources as a part of the network mutually coordinated by the UCEC and themselves in seeking a viable economic development program. As a result the entire community education network can be strengthened through integrated efforts which result in pro-active, dynamic and well-funded programs at all levels.

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